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Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, Witness That George Washington Was A Communicant Of The Church

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SOLDIER and SERVANT SERIES

Mrs. Alexander Hamilton

Witness that

George Washington

Communicant of the Church

E. Hamilton

CHURCH MISSIONS PUBLISHING COMPANY
FEBRUARY — 25 CENTS — 1932

Courtesy of the Rev. Joseph P. McComas, D.D.

The Washington Pew in St. Paul's Chapel,

where, according to the testimony of Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, George Washington received the Holy Communion on the day of his Inauguration as first President of the United States.

Soldier and Servant Series

Mrs. Alexander Hamilton

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George Washington

was

A Communicant of the Church

CHURCH MISSIONS PUBLISHING COMPANY
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SOLDIER AND SERVANT SERIES

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MRS. ALEXANDER HAMILTON
Witness that
GEORGE WASHINGTON
was
A COMMUNICANT OF THE CHURCH

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PREFATORY NOTE

The Sermon which is referred to in the following pages was constructed on the principle of throwing light on the character of Washington by citing examples of the impression which he made on others. The instances were for the most part of incidents not commonly found in the histories. It contains James Russell Lowell's hymn, and Washington's prayer. The publication was dedicated to the Rev. George T. Linsley, D.D., Rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Hartford, Connecticut, where the sermon was preached. It may be had as a printed and fully illustrated pamphlet by applying to the publishers.:

GEORGE WASHINGTON

LEADER OF MEN: COMMUNICANT OF THE CHURCH

Published by the

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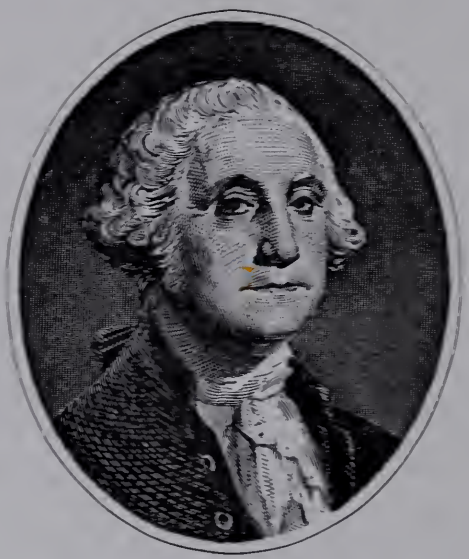
We would gratefully thank The Historical Society, through Mr. George Goddard, for the privilege of reproducing the line engraving from Mrs. Alexander Hamilton's portrait, on the cover, from page 60 of Vol. III of Appleton's Encyclopaedia of American Biography; the Rev. Joseph P. McComas, D.D., Vicar of St. Paul's Chapel, New York, for the loan of a photograph of the Washington Pew, reproduced as the frontispiece; and the Blackstone Memorial Library in Branford, Conn., for much of the historical data.



G. Washington

TESTIMONY
of
MRS. ALEXANDER HAMILTON
that
GEORGE WASHINGTON
was
A COMMUNICANT OF THE CHURCH

"—that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

FOR SOME YEARS it seemed uncertain whether Washington was a communicant of the Church. No clergyman of a parish church had, apparently, left any record to that effect. Many years ago there was a discussion of the question in *The Churchman* newspaper, some taking the position that Washington was a communicant, others, that, while it was known that he was an attendant at the Service of Morning Prayer at Pohick Church, and in other churches, as St. Peter's, Philadelphia, and Trinity Church, Newport, it was not proved that Washington had received the Holy Communion. The result of the general discussion seemed to be the probability that Washington was a communicant.

Positive proof has recently established the fact that the Father of His Country was a communicant of the Episcopal Church.

MRS. ALEXANDER HAMILTON, the wife, and for fifty years the widow, of the eminent statesman bearing that name, testified to that fact. Her testimony had never appeared in print until seven years ago.

THE INITIAL OCCASION which led to the written account by the Rev. Alexander Hamilton of the narrative to him by Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, 1st., of the events of Inauguration Day, April 30, 1789, hereinafter printed, was this:

After one of the Annual Meetings of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, held in the Diocese of Connecticut, one of the officers of the Connecticut Branch of the Auxiliary put some question to Mr. Hamilton.

As that lady recalls it, Mr. Hamilton told her that at the time of a reunion of the Hamilton family (descendants of Alexander Hamilton, the statesman, whom the Rev. Mr. Hamilton

calls, rightly, General Hamilton, as Alexander Hamilton was appointed a Major General of the Army of the United States, July 19, 1798), his (the Rev. Mr. Hamilton's) great-grandmother, Mrs. Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, the daughter of General Philip J. Schuyler, and widow of Alexander Hamilton, 1st., took him, then a little boy in his seventh year to St. Paul's Chapel, New York, and said to him:

"If anyone ever tells you that George Washington was not a communicant of the Church, you say that your great grandmother told you to say that she 'had knelt at this chancel rail at his side and received with him the Holy Communion.' "

*The member of the Auxiliary, mentioned in previous paragraph, hearing that a Washington sermon was to be preached in the Church of the Good Shepherd in Hartford, Connecticut, related to the preacher her conversation with the Rev. Mr. Hamilton. He wrote about it to the Rev. Mr. Hamilton, who wrote out and sent to the preacher the account which here follows. Mr. Hamilton's letter was read together by this member of the Auxiliary, her two sisters, her brother, the preacher's wife, and the preacher, and they all agreed as to its contents. It was confirmed by a conversation with Mr. Hamilton over the telephone. It was then set up in type, and the printer's proof was sent to the Rev. Mr. Hamilton. He read the proof, and in writing confirmed the statement. The account so confirmed was printed in the sermon afterward published under the title, "George Washington: Leader of Men and Communicant of the Church," and in the preface to the sermon the second, confirmatory, statement of Mr. Hamilton was also printed.

Copies of the sermon were sent to Mr. Hamilton, and he never subsequently changed any of the narrative, or of his confirmatory statement, or of the statement originally made to the member of the Woman's Auxiliary.

THE REVEREND ALEXANDER HAMILTON, the third in descent from the statesman, and the fourth in name, after reading the proof, made this confirmatory statement:

"IT SEEMS BUT YESTERDAY this interesting event took place, and when I related the same to my mother's sister in Philadelphia, Pa., some years past, she confirmed all—for Mrs. Alexander Hamilton (they were intimate friends) told her of the event." Mr. Hamilton further wrote at the end of this confirmatory statement, "With my eyes I can see and my ears hear all that I have related above." This is the narrative which he gave:

---

*Miss Edith Beach of Vine Hill, West Hartford, Conn.

MRS. ALEXANDER HAMILTON

"IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL MORNING IN MAY, 1854, that the family coach drew up in front of the family home, 17 w. 20th. Street, New York City. There Mrs. General Hamilton (who had come on from Washington, D. C., with her son), her daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Church Hamilton, and A. Hamilton (the writer of this letter and present Rev. Alexander Hamilton) entered and rode to Wall Street, corner of Broad, New York City.

"THEN MRS. GENERAL HAMILTON, her daughter-in-law and great-grandson, Alexander, entered the former house of Alexander Hamilton. Going to the front window, Mrs. Hamilton said, "'I, with Mrs. Knox and other ladies, looked from this window over to Federal Hall and saw George Washington inaugurated first President of the United States.

"'Then we all walked up Broadway to St. Paul's Chapel, Fulton Street.

"Washington, Chancellor Livingston, General Knox and your great-grandfather (meaning General Hamilton), went into the chapel and occupied the pew on the north side. We ladies sat just back of them, but Mrs. Washington was not present, being yet at Mount Vernon. A festal celebration was held, sermon preached by the rector, and the Holy Communion was also celebrated, at which Washington, members of his party and many others partook.'

"Mrs. Hamilton then said to me, 'My son, I have taken you to Wall Street and there depicted the inauguration; then to St. Paul's Chapel, where Washington attended divine service, and received the Holy Communion. I want you to transmit these facts to future generations, as some have asked, "Was Washington a communicant of the Church, did he ever partake of the Holy Communion?"'

Mr. Hamilton further related that when his great-grandmother was a young girl, before her marriage to Alexander Hamilton, she was with her father, General Philip Schuyler, one of Washington's aides, at Valley Forge, and saw the terrible sufferings of our men, and heard at that time Washington's fervent prayer that all might be well.

General Burgoyne's soldiers had burned her father's house at Albany in October, 1777. John Fiske says that "As the poor soldiers marched on the 17th of December [1777] to their winter quarters [at Valley Forge], their route could be traced on the snow by the blood that oozed from bare, frost-bitten feet." And, "On the morning of the 18th of June, 1778, the rear-guard of the British marched out of Philadelphia, and before sunset the American advance marched in, and took possession of the city."

Apparently the homeless daughter of the colonial general found domicile with her father in what an English writer, the Rt. Hon. Sir George Otto Trevelyan, has said, "bids fair to be the most celebrated encampment in the world's history."

General Burgoyne afterward expressed to General Schuyler his regret for the burning of his home.

That the Washington family were Episcopalians may not be due entirely to the fact that Virginia was primarily a Church of England colony. For, from their earliest known ancestors till George all the Washingtons were king's men. Henry VIII undoubtedly gave Sulgrave Manor to Laurence Washington for his loyalty. Nothing is recorded of their attitude toward Queen Mary, but they are known to have been devoted to Queen Elizabeth, and to the Stuarts. It is believed it was to escape from the Cromwellian regime that George Washington's ancestors came to Virginia. So it was wholly in line with the family tradition that George Washington was a worshipper in what was in his youth the colonial Church of England, and, after the Revolution, what is commonly called the Episcopal Church.

The Rev. Mr. Hamilton went on to say:

"MY GREAT-UNCLE ALEXANDER, son of General Hamilton, also told me how Washington after his return to Mount Vernon was a regular attendant of the services of the parish church. And on one occasion, when many prominent men were calling on him, Washington said to them, 'The church bell is ringing in yonder church, to which I go, and I hope you will all do so.'"

Such was the Rev. Mr. Hamilton's narrative, and the eminence of the persons whom he mentions gives added interest to the story of the events.

ELIZABETH SCHUYLER, daughter of General Philip J. Schuyler, brought into the life of her brilliant husband, Alexander Hamilton, values equally dazzling to his own. He had come out of the West Indies as unknown as young Lochinvar. She was the daughter of a most distinguished and wealthy family of the colonies. He probably kindled her imagination first by his letter describing the capture of Benedict Arnold and the grief of Mrs. Arnold. They were married in December, 1780, each twenty-three years of age, he being 28 days her senior. Two tragedies at least entered her life,—the first when, in October 1777, the soldiers of General Burgoyne burned her father's princely house, with its barns and granaries. She rendered assistance to her husband in his labors, counselled him in his affairs, and kept his papers in order, until he fell at the hand of

Aaron Burr, having himself, it was said, shot his own pistol in the air. After his death she preserved the large collection of manuscripts which was acquired by the U. S. Government in 1849, and which have been source material for the biographies of Hamilton, and knowledge of secret personal influences in many public events between 1775 and 1804, the year of his death. This was the illustrious lady who testified to her great-grandson that Washington was a communicant of the Church. She died in Washington, D. C., November 8, 1854, but was buried from Trinity Church, New York. She had worn her widow's habit from the day of her husband's death until her own.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, JR., the great-uncle whom the Rev. Mr. Hamilton quotes, son of Alexander Hamilton and Elizabeth Schuyler, was born in New York City, May 16, 1786, and was graduated from Columbia College in 1804, probably not many days before his father's death on July 11 of that year. He studied law, and was admitted to practice. He went abroad, and was with the Duke of Wellington's army in Portugal in 1811, but returned on hearing rumors of war with Great Britain. He was appointed captain of U. S. Infantry in August, 1813, and acted as aide-de-camp to General Morgan Lewis in 1814. In 1882 he was appointed U. S. attorney in Florida, and in 1823 one of the Florida land commissioners. His last years were passed in New Brunswick, N. J., and in New York City where he died August 2, 1875.

JOHN CHURCH HAMILTON, another son of Alexander Hamilton and Elizabeth Schuyler, was born in Philadelphia, August 22, 1792, and was therefore sixty-two years of age when his wife, with Mrs. Alexander Hamilton and her great-grandson Alexander, made the visit to Wall Street and St. Paul's Chapel. He was graduated from Columbia in 1809, became a lawyer, and a lieutenant in the U. S. Army in March, 1814. He served as aide-de-camp to General Harrison, but resigned January 11, 1814. He spent many years in preparing memoirs of his father, editing the latter's works and died at Long Branch, July 25, 1882.

IT WAS THE LONGEVITY of these brothers and their sister which made the testimony of the Rev. Alexander possible. It will have been seen how all the details fit together as nicely as the pieces in a mosaic. Practically every fact mentioned by Mrs. Hamilton, other than the Service of Holy Communion at St. Paul's Chapel, is recorded by contemporaneous writers. Mrs. Washington was not at the Inaugural,—Washington rode away from Mount Vernon with only two attendants; the Inauguration was at Federal Hall; the procession did walk instead of riding from Wall Street to Fulton; the Service was at St. Paul's

instead of Trinity because Trinity Church had been burned and not yet rebuilt; and Bishop Provoost was Rector of Trinity Parish, of which St. Paul's was a chapel, as well as Bishop of New York, and so was rightly called "the rector" by Mrs. Hamilton. In the perfect pattern recorded in historical works only one item is missing, the Holy Communion with Washington and his friends as communicants, and that was supplied by Mrs. Alexander Hamilton in the vivid and distinctive conversation reported by her great-grandson.

GENERAL SCHUYLER HAMILTON, son of John Church Hamilton, and grandson of Alexander Hamilton, was born in New York, July 5, 1822, graduated from West Point in 1841, served with great gallantry in the Mexican War, and was brevetted first lieutenant in 1846, and captain in 1847. From then until 1854 he was aide-de-camp to General Winfield Scott. On the outbreak of the War between the States he entered as private, but was rapidly promoted, becoming a brigadier-general of volunteers in 1861, and a major-general of volunteers in 1862. He served with distinction until sickness compelled him to resign in 1863. Through 1871-5 he was occupied in civic works in New York. He wrote *A History of our National Flag*. He died March 18, 1903.

For some years he resided in Branford, Connecticut, on the well known estate called "Cherry Hill," from the abundance of that fruit. Judge Henry Hart, father of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Hart, said that when he and his young friends used to drive from Old Say Brook to New Haven, they would turn up to Cherry Hill, the inviting product of which was apparently free to all. In Revolutionary times "Cherry Hill" was the property of Ralph Isaacs, a Portuguese Christian Jew, a member of the Episcopal Church and a loyalist. Twice he was interned on his own estate by the patriots, but otherwise seems to have been unmolested. He was a generous contributor to the building of Trinity Church, Branford, erected in 1785. General Schuyler Hamilton was succeeded in the possession of "Cherry Hill" by Mr. John W. Nichols who, with the other members of his family, also was a generous benefactor of Trinity Church.

THE REVEREND ALEXANDER HAMILTON, great-grandson of Alexander and Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, grandson of John Church and Maria Vandenheuval Hamilton, and son of Alexander (3d.) and Elizabeth Smith (Nicoll) Hamilton, was born at Setauket. L. I.. N. Y., Sept. 9, 1847. He was educated at Chester Academy, St. Stephen's College, and the General Theological Seminary (1874); was ordained deacon by

Bishop Horatio Potter, 1870, and priest by Bishop Henry Codman Potter, 1890; married Adele (Walton), June 12, 1872; (2) May C. Von Spoor, May 26, 1909. He served at Pleasantville, New Castle, N. Y. and at St. Stephen's Church, Armonk, N. J., 1871; was rector of St. James' Church, Dover Plains, N. Y., 1904; Weston, Redding, Easton, Bethlehem, Southbury, Woodbury, Conn., 1870-1915; rector of Christ Church, Rye, N. Y., and missionary in the Diocese of Connecticut, 1915-18; rector and rector emeritus of Christ Church, Westport, Conn., from 1918 until his death, June 3, 1928.

The Reverend Mr. Hamilton's own manner of telling the story weaves everything together as perfectly as his great-grandmother's had done,—the Hamilton home at 17 West 20th. Street, the former Alexander Hamilton house at Wall and Broad streets, and the well known friendships of Washington, Livingstone, Knox, Hamilton, and Bishop Provoost, "the patriot Rector of Trinity Church." No further confirmation of his narrative was needed. And yet a totally unexpected confirmation has come, seven years after his story was published.

THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, on Tuesday, January 26, 1932, published a communication from a member of the Church Missions Publishing Company, quoting the Rev. Mr. Hamilton's testimony as of interest in this Washington year. On the same day a reader of that newspaper wrote to the contributor a letter in which he confirmed Mrs. Hamilton's affirmation that Washington was a communicant of the Episcopal Church.

MR. LINSON H. DE VOE, of East Orange, New Jersey. wrote thus: "May a stranger to you write a few words of appreciation relating to your letter in the Herald-Tribune, printed this date?

"My boyhood was passed in Tarrytown, N. Y.; I was born in Sleepy Hollow where my forebears settled in 1685. As a small boy having ambitions to enter West Point, engineering and surveying had great attractions and I embraced every opportunity offered by the engineering firm of Ward Carpenter and Son to work with them.

"The senior Carpenter was known far and wide as an astronomer and scientist; his son's fame spread over many countries as a mathematician and chess expert. Their associates were men in the higher walks of life; among them Cyrus W. Field, George Rockwell, Robert Hoe, Alexander Hamilton, Junior, John Church Hamilton, Gen. Schuyler Hamilton, and many others.

"One day, while surveying the property adjoining the Hamilton estate, General Schuyler Hamilton, Mr. Field, and the Reverend J. Selden Spencer, Rector of Christ Episcopal Church, engaged in discussion of Alexander Hamilton's wonderful ability in the financial field. The Rector brought up the subject of friendship between Washington and Hamilton, but deplored Washington's lack of orthodoxy. The General immediately took up the Rector, and said:

"'I have it on the absolute authority of my great-grandmother (Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, 1st.) that George Washington communed in the Episcopal Church; that is sufficient for me, as my great-grand-mother would not have said so unless it was a fact known to her by personal observation.'

"That was impressed on my memory deeply, as the General had a manner of saying things that left no doubt of his earnestness.

"My grandfather Tompkins was an intimate friend of the General while he lived in New York City and in Tarrytown. My maternal grandfather, Abraham De Voe, a landscape gardener, laid out the Hamilton grounds, and many of the beautiful grounds along the Hudson showed his beautiful handiwork."

Mr. De Voe's first ancestor in the male line landed in America, Nov. 10, 1674, of the Huguenot family of southern France, de Faux, which was modified to De Voe by living among the Dutch settlers of New York. Mr. De Voe was born at the family homestead in Sleepy Hollow and often heard people relate conversations held with the famous author, Washington Irving. His own family was acquainted with a wide circle, and he heard the celebrated violinist Ole Bull play at his uncle's home.

Thus we have an interlocking chain of evidence that Mrs. Alexander Hamilton testified from her personal knowledge that Washington was a communicant of the Episcopal Church. The Rev. Alexander Hamilton transmitted that testimony, which was ratified by his mother's sister. Mr. Linson H. De Voe, quite independently, recalls Schuyler Hamilton's testimony to the same. No more perfect concatenation of circumstances, to use that phrase technically, could be asked to establish a fact.

In fine, the truth that George Washington was a communicant of the Episcopal Church is certified by a double line of testimony going back to the personal knowledge and witness of one of the most illustrious ladies of American history,—

ELIZABETH SCHUYLER, DAUGHTER OF GENERAL PHILIP SCHUYLER, WIFE AND WIDOW OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON.

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